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RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0194

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 MADRID 000862

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CU](#) [SP](#)  
SUBJECT: SPAIN/CUBA: VISIT OF WHA DAS MADISON

REF: A. BRUSSELS 1537  
[1](#)B. BERLIN 934  
[1](#)C. HAVANA 367

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Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens; Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. In a May 4 meeting with visiting WHA Deputy Assistant Secretary Kirsten Madison, MFA Director General for Ibero America Javier Sandomingo defended Spain's decision to ramp up contact with the Castro Government, though he acknowledged that Spain "made mistakes" in the course of FM Moratinos' recent visit to Havana. Madison reviewed USG concerns regarding Castro regime efforts to sow division within the EU and between the EU and the US, noting that the Moratinos visit did not help and sent an unfortunate message to Cuba's democratic opposition that they would be left out of discussions on Cuba's post-Fidel future. She underscored that the release of a few political prisoners should not be our objective; democratic countries should insist that the Cuban authorities cease the practice of arresting and trying pro-democracy dissidents as a first step towards establishing a dialogue between the Cuban Government and its own people. Madison urged Spain to work with the USG towards a common front to create the conditions for reform in Cuba. Sandomingo stuck to the view that engagement with the Raul-led authorities represented the best hope for steering Cuba towards economic reforms, and eventually towards political reforms. He said that Raul Castro was in a strong position and that there was no significant internal pressure that would force him towards democratic reforms, contrasting this with strong popular pressure by Cubans for rapid improvements in living conditions. Sandomingo indicated that the Moratinos visit was in large part intended as a signal to Latin America that Spain will play a key role in Cuba and said that Spain expected Mexico, Chile, and Panama to engage Havana soon along the lines of the "Spanish model." He expressed great irritation at the opposition of Central and Eastern European countries to Spain's Cuba policies, saying that it was easy for them since they had no stake in Cuba's future whereas Spain had significant interests at play. In response to a query from Madison regarding reports that Spain had blocked EU funding for a "Reporters Without Borders" Cuba program, Sandomingo said bluntly that Spain would oppose EU

funding for "provocative" programs directed at Cuba.

12. (C) Separately, DAS Madison met with a range of Spanish and Cuban academics, human rights activists, and others to discuss US views on the situation in Cuba. She met with the opposition Popular Party think tank "FAES" to exchange impressions of how the Cuba issue was viewed within Spain and at the EU level. End Summary.

//MADISON URGES UNITY ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES//

13. (C) DAS Madison shared with Sandomingo the USG's analysis that the Cuban Government is attempting to create a favorable international environment for a continuation of the Castro regime beyond Fidel's lifetime. With this in mind, Havana seeks to create divisions within the EU and between the EU and the US to prevent the formation of a unified international front that could pressure the Cuban regime to undertake meaningful political and economic reforms. Madison assessed that the Cuban Government had made some progress in carrying out this diplomatic strategy. In this context, the visit of FM Miguel Angel Moratinos to Havana had not been helpful to those in Cuba who are working towards a democratic future. The USG's view was that democratic countries with interests in Cuba had an obligation to act in ways that did not cut the legs out from under the Cuban opposition. Madison described the recent Unity Statement by Cuban opposition groups as evidence that Cuban nationalism, at the level of the population not the government, was asserting itself in rejecting foreign interference. She indicated that all EU countries understood and appreciated that the USG would present its specific concerns regarding the Spanish initiative on Cuba directly in Madrid. However, Madison told Sandomingo that she and Cuba Transition Coordinator McCarry had made clear in discussions in Brussels and elsewhere in

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Europe the USG's view that the release of just a few political prisoners was a classic Cuban tactic designed to create division and take pressure off them and did not represent an advance in overall human rights conditions. She indicated that they discussed that the democratic opposition's Unity for Freedom statement needed to be understood as a message that Cubans want their government to talk to them about the future of their country, not negotiate deals with third governments. Real progress could only come about with a halt in the Cuban Government's practice of using the state to suppress peaceful political dissent.

//SPAIN BETTING ON ENGAGEMENT//

14. (C) Sandomingo, who was accompanied by MFA Subdirector General for Central America and the Caribbean Carmen Diez, said that it was easy for Cuba to divide the US and EU on Cuba, given the significant difference in our tactical approaches. In light of the failure of both the EU and USG approaches to effect change in Cuba, Spain now sought to change the dynamic through greater engagement with the Castro regime. Sandomingo said that the Spanish-Cuban human rights mechanism that was established during the Moratinos visit should be given a chance to work, though he hinted that there was uncertainty whether the mechanism would be launched in May as agreed by the two parties. Sandomingo said that Spain remained committed to the fundamental premise that Cuba's future was up to the Cubans themselves and said he did not take seriously criticism of the Moratinos visit on the part of some dissident figures. He agreed that the Cuban Government was likely to continue jailing dissidents, but said that Spain's view was that the release of any political prisoners was good and should be an objective of the international community.

15. (C) DAS Madison suggested that it would be more useful to present a united front at the international level to press the Cuban regime to end its repressive policies, thereby setting the stage for the necessary dialogue between the

Cuban Government and its own people. She expressed skepticism about Cuban compliance with a political dialogue, given that the mechanism would apparently not deal with "internal matters." She argued that international capitulation on human rights issues would remove any incentive for Raul Castro and the revolutionary elite to permit reforms. Madison said that the USG had been told that one of Cuba's objectives was the elimination of both the 2003 EU Restrictive Measures and the EU Common Position on Cuba in order to reduce external pressure for democratic reforms and to win international legitimacy for a Raul-led government. She indicated that many EU countries were concerned that consensus be maintained and viewed the existing Common Position as the best option for doing so.

16. (C) Sandomingo said that Raul Castro was firmly installed in power and indicated that Castro "doesn't need the EU to confer legitimacy upon him." EU measures against Cuba were therefore not a high priority for the Castro Government. He said that some members of the Cuban government (but decidedly not Raul Castro) wanted Spain to increase its profile in Cuba in order to help promote change. Sandomingo expressed the view that no change was possible while Fidel Castro remains alive, since his presence continues to cast a long shadow over all sectors of Cuban Government and society. He noted wryly that Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage even refused to discuss the economic reforms of the 1990s that he himself engineered. He said that Spain wants real change in Cuba, not leadership by Raul Castro, and argued that an increased Spanish presence would help generate internal pressure in favor of reforms. Regarding the opposition movement, Sandomingo asserted that Spain had assisted Cuban dissidents "even when the Cuban exile community and the Eastern Europeans didn't... We are fully aware of what the dissidents represent, but they are not capable of bringing about change in Cuba on their own."

//EMBARGO ISSUE//

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17. (C) Sandomingo said that Spain expects Fidel Castro to pass from the scene "sooner rather than later." He said Raul Castro would institute economic reforms out of necessity, since the Cuban Government did not fear the political opposition but did have a healthy respect for the desire among ordinary Cubans for improved living conditions. Without Fidel Castro in place to block basic economic improvements, Spanish analysts expected these reforms to develop their own momentum and lead to eventual political reforms as well. Sandomingo suggested that the USG could help this process by "flooding Cuba with tourists and money," as it would undermine the Cuban Government's contention that the embargo was the cause of Cuba's economic misery. He said that the Cuban Government wanted to keep the Embargo in place to keep up the pretense of an external threat.

18. (C) DAS Madison countered this view, explaining the USG's assessment that ending USG Cuba sanctions at this time would represent a net benefit to the Castro regime. In 2002, President Bush made clear that changes in USG policy would be driven by changes on the island and indicated that his Administration was ready to work with Congress to end the embargo if the Cuban Government took concrete steps towards political and economic reforms, but this offer had fallen on deaf ears in Havana. Madison pointed out that while many EU governments urge the USG to end the embargo, those same governments acknowledge that they would not change their own Cuba policies in response to such a USG gesture. She also noted that several EU countries had told us that the US embargo continued to worry the Cuban Government.

//SPANISH IRRITATION WITH CENTRAL EUROPEANS//

19. (C) Sandomingo complained bitterly that some EU members did not care at all about Cuba, but took a hard line against

the Castro Government only to strengthen their relations with the USG. He said that several visiting Central European diplomats had told him freely that their main interest on Cuba was to be seen as working with Washington on an issue that mattered to the USG. Sandomingo said that it was difficult to work with partners like these and that the "constant discussion" of this issue with some EU members was "very uncomfortable" for Spain. He indicated that Spain hoped the USG could act to reduce this criticism by certain EU partners; DAS Madison expressed puzzlement as to why the USG would work to rein in EU partners that supported USG views on Cuba, not to mention those countries' own views on the need to defend civil liberties. Madison asked about reports that Spain was blocking EU funding of projects like "Reporters Without Borders" program on Cuba. She indicated that the USG had discussed with the EU Commission concrete programs to support a transition process, including programs to help Cubans fill economic space if the GOC undertakes modest economic reforms. Sandomingo responded vigorously that Spain would block any EU funding of projects that would be seen as "provocative" by the Cuban authorities. He said Spain would support "discreet and effective" programs geared towards Cuba, but not public initiatives.

// "DON'T LEAVE US ALONE ON CUBA" //

¶10. (C) Turning to domestic politics, DAS Madison said the USG understood that the Cuba issue was an important matter for the broad range of Spanish society for historical, cultural, and economic reasons. In the U.S. context, Madison said the Moratinos trip to Cuba was like "throwing an explosive device" into the middle of the Cuban American community. She pointed out that in September 2006, WHA A/S Shannon had asked senior Spanish officials not to "leave the USG alone" on the Cuba issue, and noted "but you did." She highlighted that having other countries work with us increases the space in which implement our policies. The USG believed Spain had agreed on the need to work together, but the timing and substance of the Moratinos visit suggested that Spain had decided to go its own way. Madison said that we understood that the Spanish Government undertook the Moratinos visit to Havana with domestic political considerations in mind, but that it did cause considerable

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consternation in Cuban exile communities which was being expressed to the USG. Also, she emphasized to Sandomingo that we viewed Cuban efforts to go through third parties as part of their effort to create divisions and therefore A/S Shannon had advised the Cuban Interests Section that Washington did not seek or want intermediaries and that if the Cubans had something they wanted to say to the USG, the Interests Section is the proper channel.

¶11. (C) Sandomingo (who was clearly uncomfortable at being reminded of the USG request to work together on Cuba) said that Spain had no intent to leave anyone alone on this issue. He said that "nobody, not even Spain," can replace the U.S. as the most important external actor on Cuba.

// LATIN AMERICANS MAY ALSO VISIT HAVANA //

¶12. (C) DAS Madison said that, while it was important to gain EU activism to promote improvements in Cuba, the USG hoped Spain and the USG could work together to influence Latin America to help Cuba catch up to the rest of the region. Sandomingo agreed on the importance of Latin American engagement and said that this was actually a key objective of the Moratinos visit to Havana. He said that at the beginning of the Zapatero administration, Spain had attempted to develop a common front with major Latin American countries on the Cuba issue, but that those countries balked and pressed Madrid to take another approach on Cuba. Sandomingo assessed that Mexico, Chile, and Panama were now likely to undertake their own high level visits to Havana, along the lines of the "Spanish model" and noted that Spain had been talking to each

of those governments. He expects Mexican President Calderon to normalize relations with Cuba and to visit Havana. He was skeptical about the potential for Brazil to show leadership on the issue in the region.

//SANDOMINGO REQUESTS USG PATIENCE, ASSISTANCE//

¶13. (C) Sandomingo said that Spain shared the same objectives as the USG in Cuba and believed that the Moratinos visit was the best way to work towards those objectives. He said that Spain "probably made mistakes" in the visit, for example by leaving the USG out of the loop until the last minute. Sandomingo explained that FM Moratinos had insisted on keeping a very close hold on preparations for the visit. He said that Spain was paying a high political price for the visit to Cuba, but pointed to the resumption of Spanish aid programs to the Cuban Government and discussions on the reopening of the Spanish Cultural Center in Havana as key results that would allow Spain to reengage Cuban civil society. Sandomingo requested USG patience and suggested that Washington could assist overall developments in Cuba by addressing two "internal Cuban blockades" to reform: first, the fear by regime insiders that democratic reforms will lead to their "hanging from lampposts"; and second, fear within the Cuban population that they were in danger of losing their homes and their jobs to vengeful exiles. He acknowledged DAS Madison's point that the second CAFC report and the USG's public messages had emphasized the USG's encouragement of reconciliation, but said these positive messages should be reiterated frequently. Sandomingo said Spain was trying to reassure Cuba's governing class that they would have a future in the new Cuba, in hopes that this would diminish their opposition to changing the status quo.

//SPANISH CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGED ON THE CUBA ISSUE//

¶14. (SBU) DAS Madison also attended a dinner at the DCM's residence with a cross-section of Spanish opinion leaders, activists, and business figures with interests in Cuba, met with Spain-based Cuba human rights groups, and attended a seminar at the opposition Popular Party think tank FAES. The dinner included representatives from leading Spanish think tanks, including the Elcano Institute and Socialist-affiliated FRIDE, Cuban dissident supporters Antonio Guedes (Cuban Liberal Union) and Annabelle Rodriguez (Cuba Encuentro), as well as an attorney from a major Spanish firm with interests in Florida and contacts in Cuba. There

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was an extensive debate on the Moratinos visit to Havana, with a broad consensus among the guests that the visit had been well-intentioned, but bungled. Guedes, who is a close associate of Cuban writer Carlos Alberto Montaner, was more critical of the shift in Spanish policy, which he said demonstrated a lack of respect for pro-democracy groups. All of the participants demonstrated great interest in DAS Madison's analysis of the state of play within the EU on the Cuba issue, which remains unclear to even long-time observers in Spain.

¶15. (SBU) A meeting at the Embassy with Cuba human rights organizations included representatives from the Hispano-Cuban Foundation, the Cuban Pro Human Rights Committee, the Iberoamerican Liberty Association, and the participation of Blanca Reyes, spouse of dissident writer Raul Rivero, in her role as the European representative of the Cuban "Ladies in White" group. The groups described their activities in support of Cuban human rights activists and their various programs for sending books and other materials to dissidents in Cuba. DAS Madison praised the groups for their efforts and discussed her visit to Spain and other EU countries to urge greater European support for Cuban human rights activists and for the maintenance of a principled EU position with respect to Cuba.

¶16. (SBU) FAES, the PP think tank headed by former President



Aznar, organized a seminar for DAS Madison that included FAES leader, PP Parliamentarians, and the Cuba human rights group "Cuba in Transition." Parliamentarian Carlos Salvador discussed the PP's initiatives in the Spanish legislature to keep up the pressure on Cuba, including submitting a draft resolution calling for the Spanish Government to pressure the Cuban Government to release political prisoners, improve human rights practices, and recognize the right of the Cuban people to chart their own futures (NOTE: The PP resolution was defeated on May 8 by a vote of 187 to 123, with regional center-right parties supporting the PP measure and the Socialist Party joining far left parties to defeat the initiative. END NOTE). Former Ambassador Eduardo Gutierrez, deputy coordinator for PP international relations, joined FAES international relations director Jose Herrera in suggesting that the Moratinos trip to Cuba formed part of a broader Socialist effort to form an anti-USG front in Latin America. DAS Madison responded that while the USG disagreed with the shift in Spanish policy towards Cuba, we worked closely with Spain on other issues in Latin America and did not believe the Spanish Government was encouraging anti-US sentiment in the region.

117. (U) DAS Madison reviewed and cleared on this message.  
Aguirre